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**Capitol View
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

**Statehouse Correspondent**

**Nebraska Press Association**

**Which Millionaire Republican Will Be Governor?**

Spring is right around the corner. The Nebraska statewide primary election is May 10. I’m really looking forward to Spring. The other event might as well be a colonoscopy.

It seems that in Nebraska, every four years the voters get together to decide which millionaire Republican will be the next Governor. Often, the winner of the Republican primary is the next governor.

Yes, I believe in miracles. I have no doubt that God could part the Platte River and create a lake bigger than Okoboji somewhere between Lincoln and Omaha along Interstate 80. After all, Hollywood tells us that if we build it, they will come.

But I Know Nebraska history and the reality is that the days of Exon, Kerrey and Nelson are over for the Democrats. The Independents are growing, but not yet strong enough.

So, we’re stuck with two millionaire Republicans, Pillen and Herbster, a farmer-businessman and a rancher-businessman. Pillen raises pigs. Herbster raises cattle. There’s a great Nebraskaesque scenario that would play in the movies.

According to official campaign finance reports, Pillen raised $5.3 million in cash by the end of last year. One million of that was from his own pocket. Herbster reported $4.9 million in cash in 2021 and $4.7 million of that came from his own pocket.

Pillen claims the support of the old guard Nebraska Republicans. Herbster touts an endorsement by former President Donald Trump. Pillen’s campaign ads show him in an orange hunting vest while holding a shotgun as he talks about the problems in Washington, DC. Herbster poses in front of the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

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What does any of that have to do with things that should concern the Governor of Nebraska?

Two University of Nebraska-Lincoln political science professors have told local media the ads reflect the nationalization of politics and the polarization of the two parties. Elizabeth Theiss-Morse said there’s a mandate to follow the party line in primary races, because candidates are trying to appeal to a more “activist base” and show they will carry the party mantle.

Professor Kevin Smith said it has reached the local level now. If somebody’s running for dog catcher now, they’re saying ‘I’m for Trump,’ or ‘I’m against Trump,’ or, ‘I’m against what the Republicans are doing in Congress,’ or ‘I’m against what the Democrats are doing in Congress.’”

Former Gov. Dave Heineman said the two perceived as front-runners need to focus on the issues that actually impact Nebraskans’ lives. They’re too focused on national issues, he said, when they should be getting more specific about how they’ll “reform and restructure our 1967 tax code,” address unfairness in school funding, and make up for pandemic learning loss.

Theiss-Morse said she sees another gubernatorial candidate, Brett Lindstrom, distinguishing himself by sending a different message: “Look, I’m just a good Nebraskan.”

State Sen. Carol Blood, the only Democratic candidate, said “If you’re unhappy with how things have been the last few decades, if you’re unhappy with the fact that your property taxes are too high, I’m going to ask you why you keep voting the same way.”

Smith said he wouldn’t be surprised if the race gets personal. Campaigns go negative for a reason, he said: because there’s research showing it works.

So much for Nebraska Nice.

I bet you thought politics in Nebraska was boring. Hang on, we’re headed for bumpy waters.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years.*